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Commencement 03

Newton, MA, 5/23/03-- In a stirring and inspiring address to the Boston College Law School class of 2003, Associate Justice for the United States Supreme Court Stephen Breyer urged the graduates to embrace public service as they entered the work force.

Public service can take many forms, Justice Breyer said, from pro bono legal work for those in need, to law reform, to government service. He recalled the great history of service to others within the Boston College community, from Father Monan and Father Drinan to Jack Curtin. "Change...does not occur magically," Breyer said. "It represents individual and collective pioneering efforts...my hope is that you will remember, as you create your life's story, to devote time and effort--to commit yourselves--not only to your personal lives, your careers, but also to the public affairs of your community and your nation."

Breyer appealed to the graduates to continue to uphold the "Constitution's promise of a rule of law." But perhaps his strongest point came in relating advice he had received from a former law school dean, Bayless Manning, who said that when we make an important decision, we rarely know more than ten percent of all we might like to know about it. "Sometimes we must simply choose, and our lives then shape themselves around the choices that we make--and those choices create a story," Breyer said. "Your own story will include family and friends, not just career. And it will include your own justifications for choices made. What we do and how we explain it tells us who we are. We cannot escape the negative meaning that a failure of integrity--a failure to live up to our standards of right and wrong--will give to the stories we ourselves shape. I agree with the philosopher who said that money can vanish overnight, power disappear, reputation evaporate, but character--personal integrity--is a rock that stays secure."

BC Law Dean John H. Garvey praised Justice Breyer's commitment to the law and to the nation, calling him one of the most important figures in contemporary American law. "Justice Breyer writes his opinions in a way that permits all of us, especially nonlawyers, to understand the law," Garvey said. "He does not confine his teaching to pronouncements from the bench. We honor and are honored by Justice Stephen Breyer, who by choice and conviction is a teacher to our nation."

Two hundred and eighty graduates received degrees at the Law School's 71st Commencement exercises. Receiving the school's highest awards, the Founders' Medals, were Darald and Juliet Libby, and Justice Breyer. Darald Libby, chairman of the board of the David Clark Company, is a 1955 graduate of Boston College Law School. Darald and Juliet Libby have been constant supporters of the Law School, establishing the Law School's first endowed chair in 2000 in memory of Michael G. Pierce, S.J.

The Founder's Medal is the highest honor bestowed by the Law School. The Medal is named after the Reverend John B. Crendon, S.J. who was instrumental in founding the Law School in 1929 and whose dedication to academic excellence and professionalism was the inspiration for the Founder's Medal. Recipients of the Founder's Medal embody the traditions of professionalism, scholarship and service which the Law School seeks to instill in its students.

Dean Garvey, presiding over his fourth commencement, spoke of the virtue of constancy.

"When we launch a new and life-long venture it is good to take stock of the virtues we need on board," Garvey said. "Perched on the verge of your careers, you probably have higher ambitions--to argue a case before Justice Breyer; to serve, as other BC alumni have done, as president of the BBA, MBA, ABA; maybe even to run for president of the United States...but getting elected is not in itself our true north. We should aim instead at the good we can do, and if that takes us to the Oval Office, so be it...be constant. Be true to God, your neighbor, and yourself."

Stephen Breyer has served as Associate Justice for the United States Supreme Court since 1994, when he was nominated for the position by President Clinton. Throughout his career, Justice Breyer has been praised for his skill at building consensus. As a member of the court, he believed achieving a unified opinion was more important than outlining his own opinions in detail.

Justice Breyer was born in San Francisco on August 15, 1938. He is a graduate of Stanford University, Oxford University (Magdalen College), and Harvard Law School. During the United States Supreme Court's 1964 Term he was law clerk to Justice Arthur J. Goldberg. In 1965–67 he worked as Special Assistant to the head of the Justice Department's Antitrust Division. From 1967 through 1980 he taught at Harvard University, as Professor of Law and at Harvard's Kennedy School of Government. He also worked as an Assistant Watergate Special Prosecutor (1973), as a Special Counsel to the Senate Judiciary Committee (1975), and as the Judiciary Committee's Chief Counsel (1979–80).

As a Special Counsel on the Senate Judiciary Committee, Justice Breyer developed a complicated economic plan used to deregulate the airline industry. His hard work impressed Senate Republicans, who supported his confirmation to a seat on the 1st U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals in 1980. He became the Circuit's Chief Judge in 1990. He has also served as a Member of the Judicial Conference of the United States and of the United States Sentencing Commission. He has written books and articles in the field of administrative law and government regulation.

Boston College Law School opened in 1929 in a small downtown Boston office building with 54 students and two full-time faculty members. Currently ranked 22nd in the country by the annual US News & World Report survey, the law school's highly qualified students are drawn from more than 230 colleges and universities across the United States, as well as in other countries. More than 7,800 applicants competed for 270 seats in the entering class this year. The law school's 10,000 alumni practice in 49 states and several foreign countries, holding positions in major law firms, corporate in-house legal departments, the judiciary, government agencies, private industry, academic and public interest organizations, and serving as elected state legislators and members of the U.S. Congress.